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HIST 386-002: The History of Technology

Kyle Riismandel

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HIST386 – The History of Technology:

Technology and the Consumer's Republic, 1945-Present

Professor: Dr. Kyle Riismandel

Email: kriis@njit.edu

Time: Monday and Wednesday, 9-10:20AM

Classroom: WebEx

Office: Cullimore 326/x3379 - Google Meet – <https://meet.google.com/yxc-bsid-mjx>

Student Office Hours:

Book appointments using riismandel.youcanbook.me

- Monday 12PM-2PM
- Wednesday 12PM-2PM
- Thursday 11AM-1230PM
- If you cannot meet during these times, please email me for an appointment.

Course Description

In this course, we will analyze the social and cultural histories of various consumer technologies in the context of the consumer's republic in postwar America. We will consider how these technologies were invented, distributed, used, and understood in three areas:

- Music Technologies
- Video Technologies
- Social Media and the Digital World

Through this analysis, we will make sense of the broader changes in race, class, gender, sexuality, and capitalism in postwar America tracking the interactions between consumer capitalism, social identities, and popular technology.

As an upper level course, we will focus more on reading, writing, and discussion than on lecture. To that end, class time will be spent working together to analyze primary and secondary sources and come to some bigger conclusions about that theme/unit and the course as a whole. That means there will be little to no lecturing so please come prepared to do this work.

Course Goals

- Analyze the invention, use, and distribution of consumer technologies within their historical contexts including the cultural values and social relationships articulated through these processes
- Define and analyze postwar American consumer culture
- Define and identify significant changes in postwar American culture, politics, and society
- Learn and practice the skills to analyze, discuss, and write about primary and secondary sources related to the study of American technology and consumer culture
 - Making arguments using evidence
 - Evaluating arguments
 - Implementing constructive feedback

Course Texts

All texts, including films, podcasts, etc., will be available on Canvas.

Course Grade:

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| • Class Participation | 15% |
| • Reading Quizzes (3 x 5%) | 15% |
| • Recap Paper | 10% |
| • Recap Presentation | 5% |
| • Short Paper (2 x 15%) | 30% |
| • Big Takeaway Paper | 25% |

Assignments

Participation – 15%

Students are expected to participate actively in all class discussions and activities, to be respectful to the instructor and their fellow classmates, to arrive to class on time, and to stay focused on what is happening in our classroom not on chatting or using digital devices. Further, participation will be assessed not just on quantity but also on quality. Quality participation demonstrates knowledge of the issues at hand, completion of that week's assignments, and a willingness to engage in critical assessment of course texts and lectures. The participation grade may also include pop quizzes and short writing assignments done in class.

I encourage students to check in with me over the course of the semester regarding their class participation performance. As a reminder, office hours are for meeting with students. Further, do not wait to contact me if you are falling behind or having trouble understanding course content. I am here to help!

Reading Quizzes – 3 x 5%

Three times during the semester, you will complete a multiple-choice reading quiz on Canvas designed to test reading comprehension of that day's assignment.

Recap Paper and "Presentation" – 15% (10% – paper/5% – presentation)

You will be responsible for recapping one class during the semester. That means, for your chosen date, you will write a short paper (400-750 words) that will include the key analytical takeaways from a lecture and/or discussion. That means, you should articulate what we learned or now understand about that week's theme or topic as well as how it connects to the broader themes and ideas discussed to that point in the course. At the next class, you will start by presenting your recap to the class. You do not need to do a formal presentation. Rather, you should shortly summarize the main points of your paper which should be the big takeaways from the previous class session. An assignment sheet with further instructions will be distributed on Canvas.

The goals of this assignment are to:

- Articulate to yourself and your classmates what we learned or understood about the previous class's theme or topic

- Prepare for questions on the final exam that will rely on your knowledge of these larger analytical points
- Practice historical writing including synthetic description and analysis

Short Paper x 2 – 15% each

For 2 of the 3 units, you will submit a paper (approximately 1000-1500 words) that ties together the topics in that unit. In doing so, you will make an argument that explains what those different readings, sources, etc., when analyzed together, help us understand about consumer technologies in postwar America and how they do so. An assignment sheet with further instructions will be distributed via Canvas.

Big Takeaway Paper – 25%

This assignment asks you to tie together the 3 units of the semester by making an argument about what big things we can understand about technologies and American consumer culture after analyzing all of our sources over the course of the semester. An assignment sheet with further instructions will be distributed in class and via Canvas.

Course Policies

Attendance:

Students are expected to attend all course meetings on time unless receiving prior authorization. Missing class will not only adversely affect your class participation grade, but there will be screenings in class that will only be offered during that class period so do your best to attend. If you miss class to attend an NJIT sponsored event, to observe a religious holiday, or due to a documented illness, those absences will be excused. For these absences to count as excused, you must receive permission from the instructor in advance or provide a doctor's note in the case of sickness.

Classroom Conduct:

In this course, we welcome intellectual inquiry and thoughtful discussion of difficult questions but hate speech and disrespectful comments will not be tolerated. We must come to class with an open mind, a willingness to learn, and fundamental respect for the humanity of each person in the room and the historical actors we discuss.

Office hours/student appointments:

My office hours will be:

- Monday 12PM-2PM
- Wednesday 12PM-2PM
- Thursday 11AM-1230PM

All appointments for those hours should be made at least 6 hours in advance via riismandel.youcanbook.me. I am also available to meet outside of those hours if students are unavailable during these times. Feel free to send me an email to set up a meeting if you'd like to talk or have any questions about course topics, assignments, or grades.

Academic dishonesty:

Students are expected to obey the NJIT honor code, and I will enforce this code to its fullest extent. The goal of this course is to evaluate your understanding of course materials and ability to express that understanding. Cheating, plagiarizing or otherwise violating the code of academic integrity not only breaks the trust between professor and student but keeps you from learning course content and improving writing and critical thinking skills. I am here to help so if you are having trouble, do not cheat, ask me for help.

For the tenets of the code or for clarification of what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please consult: <http://www.njit.edu/academics/honorcode.php>.

Generally speaking, it is a violation of the academic integrity code to:

- Use someone else's words or ideas without attribution
- Copy content from someone else's paper, quiz, or exam
- Pay for course assignments to be complete by someone else

Cell phones, Laptops, and Miscellaneous Technology Rules:

Though my preference is for students to have their webcams on during class, I do not require this as I know this is not necessarily feasible or comfortable for many students.

Given that class is remote, we must all do our best to stay focused on what we are working on together during class time. It is tempting to do any number of things other than listen and participate. Essentially, you are in class approximately 3 hours a week. Please be present and prepared when you are here.

Students Requiring Accommodations:

Students who require accommodations should contact NJIT's Student Disability Services to help procure accommodations in completing coursework. The center can be found at <http://www.njit.edu/counseling/services/disabilities.php>.

Course Schedule

WEEK 1

Wednesday, January 20 – Introductions/What are we doing here?/Technology and Culture

WEEK 2 – The Consumer's Republic/Radio

Monday, January 25 – Consumer Culture and Technology

Secondary Sources

- Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, Ch. 3
- David Nye, "Does Technology Control Us?"

Unit 1 – Technologies of Music

Wednesday, January 27 – Radio

Primary Source

- Alan Freed, "Rock N' Roll Show" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s19HmcLeTtQ>

Secondary Source

- Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination*, Ch. 9

WEEK 3 – Guitars/Portable, Personalized Music

Monday, February 1 – Guitars

Primary Source

- Jimi Hendrix, “Live at Monterey Pop,” 1967 - Spotify
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZot7BBzgog>

Secondary Source

- Steve Waksman, “Black Sound, Black Body: Jimi Hendrix, the Electric Guitar, and the Meanings of Blackness,” *Popular Music and Society*, 1999

Wednesday, February 3 – The Walkman

Primary Source

- Sony Walkman Commercial Playlist

Secondary Source

- Paul DuGay, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Walkman*

WEEK 4 – Streaming and Algorithms/Unit I Wrap Up

Monday, February 8 – Streaming and Algorithms

Primary Source

- Listen to WFMU
- Listen to an algorithm generated playlist of the streaming music service of your choice

Secondary Source

- Elena Razlogova, “The Past and Future of Music Listening”

Wednesday, February 10 – Unit 1 Wrap Up

Unit #1 Paper Due by 5PM, February 12th

Unit II – Video Technologies

WEEK 5 – Unit I Wrap Up

Monday, February 15– Video Tapes and the VCR

Primary Source

- VCR News and Commercial Playlist -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8Q9fKXxHjI&list=PLmUH0DO9ueN_XMprSPuB_lhmEAohPj_VNc

Secondary Source

- Frederick Wasser, *Veni, Vidi, Video: The Hollywood Empire and the VCR*, Ch. 4

Wednesday, February 17

Secondary Source

- Joshua Greenberg, *From Betamax to Blockbuster*, Ch. 4

WEEK 6 – Video Games

Monday, February 22 – The Arcade

Primary Source

- Pac Man Fever playlist -
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLwxeKweQuAmB9I_m9bbJqX66lZLo8FsDX

Secondary Source

- Kyle Riismandel, “Mallrats and Arcade Addicts”

Wednesday, February 24 – Home Console

Secondary Source

- John Willis, *Gamer Nation: Video Games and American Culture*, “Grand Theft Los Angeles”

WEEK 7 – Online Video

Monday, March 1 – Pornography

Primary Source

Secondary Source

- Zabet Patterson, "Going On-Line: Consuming Pornography in the Digital Era"
- Angela Jones, *Camming: Money, Power, and Pleasure in the Sex Work Industry*, Ch. 3

Wednesday, March 3 – Tik Tok

TBD

WEEK 8 – Unit II Wrap Up

Monday, March 8 - Discussion

Wednesday, March 10 - Discussion

Unit Paper #2 Due 5PM on March 12th

SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS

Monday, March 15

Wednesday, March 17

Unit III – Social Media

WEEK 9 – Bulletin Board Systems/AfroNet

Monday, March 22 – BBS

Primary Source

- BBS Archives - <http://archives.thebbs.org/>

Secondary Source

- *BBS: The Documentary*, Episode 2 - <https://archive.org/details/BBS.The.Documentary/BBS.The.Documentary.ep2.avi>

Wednesday, March 24 – AfroNet

Secondary Source

- Charlton D. McIlwain, *Black Software: The Internet and Racial Justice from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter*, “Black Software Comes to Cambridge”

WEEK 10 – Gamergate/Social Media and Radicalization

Monday, March 29 - Gamergate

Secondary Sources:

- Dewinter and Kocurek, “ ‘Aw Fuck, I Got a Bitch on My Team!’ Women and the Exclusionary Cultures of the Computer Game Complex”

Wednesday, March 31 – Social Media and Radicalization

Secondary Sources

- Talia Lavin, *Culture Warlords: My Journey into the Dark Web of White Supremacy*, TBD
- Casey Newton, “The Secret Life of Facebook Moderators”

WEEK 11 – Surveillance Capitalism/Navigating a Digital Life

Monday, April 5 - Surveillance Capitalism

Secondary Sources

- Shoshanna Zuboff, “How Google Discovered the Value of Surveillance” - <https://longreads.com/2019/09/05/how-google-discovered-the-value-of-surveillance/>
- Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor*, Ch.1

Wednesday, April 7 - Navigating a Digital Life

Secondary Source

- danah boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, “Identity: Why Do Teens Seem So Strange Online?”

WEEK 12 – Unit III Wrap Up

Monday, April 12 – Discussion

Wednesday, April 14 – Discussion

Unit Paper #3 Due by 5PM on April 16th

Unit IV – Course Wrap Up/Big Takeaways

WEEK 13

Monday, April 19

Wednesday, April 21

WEEK 14

Monday, April 26

Wednesday, April 28

Monday, May 3 – Paper Discussion

Big Takeaways Paper Due 5PM on May 12th